

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **MAYOR COLEMAN, CITY ATTORNEY PFIEFFER AND CITY COUNCIL PUT FORWARD NEW LAWS TO FIGHT BLIGHT**

**New legislative proposals to improve enforcement against abandoned homes and register negligent owners**

(Columbus) The City's teams fighting to fix-up urban neighborhoods will have a new tool if legislation is approved by City Council to increase Columbus' power to take over boarded-up, abandoned homes and buildings. Mayor Michael B. Coleman called for changes to the Housing Code in his 2003 State of the City Address, and has worked for the past year with City Attorney Rick Pfeiffer, City Councilmember Patsy Thomas and a task force of neighborhood leaders to create the Housing Code's new **"Title 47."**

**"Rewriting the law is a strong step in rebuilding our neighborhoods, as we work to get neglected, abandoned properties fixed-up or torn down," said Mayor Michael B. Coleman. "Title 47 helps us to be more aggressive and to work faster as we pursue those who refuse to take responsibility for their land, leaving it as a eyesore for neighbors. We will work with our Code Enforcement teams to go after these properties and help turn the homes over to responsible citizens."**

The legislation sent to Council by the Department of Development proposes changes to Columbus City Code to make it harder for owners to board up and ignore vacant properties. Title 47 in the City's Housing Code requires vacant property owners to register properties found in violation of City Codes if they fail to comply with citations.

**"Mayor Coleman has focused this administration on fighting blight in our neighborhoods. We've listened to residents input on how we can change City Code to make negligent property owners more accountable," said Mark Barbash, Columbus Development Director. "We also plan to put forward ideas to the State Legislature where Ohio's law can be changed to make it easier for cities to deal with abandoned properties."**

The Title 47 legislation is scheduled for first reading by the Columbus City Council on June 21, 2004. City Councilmember Patsy Thomas is scheduled to host a public hearing on July 14, and work toward Council passage on July 19.

In late 2002, Mayor Coleman directed Barbash to bring together a working group of neighborhood leaders, the City Attorney's office, Columbus' Division of Police and Development Department staff to address the issue of neighborhood blight focusing on vacant properties. The Quality Neighborhoods Working Group recommended a series of changes to City Code, leading to this legislation.

The existing Housing Code's Title 45 and 47 dealt with a variety of housing issues, including neglect, the new legislation consolidates the vacant housing section into one area of Title 47. This new legislation will help neighborhoods by:

- Establishes a new **"Safe Neighborhoods Review Board,"** made up of housing code experts, City employees and citizens, who will be authorized to hear housing code violation cases and to declare nuisances;
- Strengthens the Housing Codes that require owners to remove trash, cut high weeds, maintain rain gutters, maintain sanitation of interior and exterior, maintain sidewalks, clearly post house address numbers, securely board windows and doors, and many other responsibilities for a safe property;
- Requires owners of vacant buildings with records of neglect to register their properties with the City for a fee, and requires those responsible for the property to maintain insurance;
- Requires owners, through the registration process, to provide the City and the public with information necessary to contact responsible parties and obtain legal documents related to building or registration upkeep. This will help ease the frequent frustration of vacant properties with no known owner to be cited for violations;
- Allows the City to use eminent domain, in severe cases of neglect, to take blighted properties if owners refuse to comply with court orders or a responsible party cannot be found for the property.

Before the legislation was finished, the City conducted five public meetings to get citizen suggestions and concerns about the proposed changes to the Code. The Quality Neighborhood Working Group report is available upon request, or on the Mayor's Office Press Releases Page on the web at [www.columbus.gov](http://www.columbus.gov) <<http://www.columbus.gov>>.

**Quality Neighborhood Working Group members:**

Mark Barbash, Development Director, Roxyanne Burrus, Neighborhood Services Division Administrator, John M. Cullison, South Merion Public Safety Committee, Linda Donnelly, Housing Division Administrator, Mike Farrenkopf, Neighborhood Services Code Enforcement, Jenny Gams, Office of the City Attorney, Steve Gladman, Columbus Apartment Association Executive Director, Gary L. Holland, Public Safety Department Deputy Director, Donna Hunter, Office of Land Management Division Administrator, Richard Manual, South Merion Public Safety Committee, Curtis Marcum, Columbus Police Department Commander, Patrick McClean, Greater Hilltop Area Commission, Reverend Dr. Lee Anne Reat, The BREAD Organization Vice President, Michael Sexton, Office of Mayor Michael B. Coleman, Patsy Thomas, now a member of Council, for the Office of the City Attorney, Rick Tilton, Neighborhood Services Division, Neighborhood Pride.